DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 858 FL 020 478

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TITLE Creative Written Testing.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 19p.; In: Acting on Priorities: A Commitment to Excellence. Dimension: Languages '90. Report of Southern Conference on Language Teaching; see FL 020 470.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Creativity; *Language Proficiency; *Language Tests; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages; *Test Construction; Test Format; Testing; *Writing Tests

ABSTRACT

By being creative in preparing tests and by allowing creativity on the part of students, language teachers can incorporate many of the principles associated with proficiency-oriented instruction into a traditional test format. Such test strategies are based on the following: (1) testing in context is better than testing with a series of unrelated discrete items; (2) students prefer familiar contexts; (3) vocabulary assessment without lists of words to be translated is preferable; and (4) students respond well to visual stimuli. Teachers can make use of both visual and linguistic creativity in testing. Pictures can be used to test vocabulary through labeling, drawing and labeling, drawing and describing, drawing what is described, and responding to pictures with comparison, creation of dialogue, ordering of scenes, and extrapolation from a situation. Linguistic creativity can be tapped through student narratives and sentence completion exercises. For this approach to be successful, the teacher must give explicit directions and assure students that artistic ability is not graded. The approach is suitable when only a written test is desired, and is suitable for large classes. Visual stimuli are particularly appropriate for more elementary skills levels. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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CREATIVE WRITTEN TESTING

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In the past several years much attention has been given to proficiency in second language learning, especially oral proficiency. Most foreign language professionals are familiar with the oral proficiency interview (OPI) and realize the value of such testing. For these teachers, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the OPI have caused a rethinking of the methods used in the foreign language classroom. As part of the proficiency movement, much of the current focus in the classroom is on teaching language in context, and Omaggio's landmark text *Teaching Language in Context* is used as a source and guide by many foreign language teachers.

Nevertheless, many teachers are reluctant to abandon the more traditional form of testing which produces a quantitative score and which can be administered to large groups of students in a limited time frame. By being creative in preparing tests and by allowing creativity on the part of the students, teachers can incorporate many of the principles associated with proficiency-oriented instruction into a traditional testing format.

The testing strategies suggested in this article are based on these premises: (1) testing in context is better than testing with a series of unrelated discrete items; (2) students prefer contexts that are familiar to them; (3) vocabulary assessment without lists of words to be translated is good; and (4) today's students respond well to visual

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stimuli. Since these premises have been discussed in different articles and books, the rationale for them will not be repeated here. However, the bibliography gives suggestions for reading on this topic.

By using some creativity in the design of the items, teachers can prepare tests based on the above premises. In this article two forms of creativity are discussed. One is an artistic creativity which requires the students or teacher to draw, and the other is linguistic creativity which involves eliciting original answers from the students. The two aspects are combined in some of the testing suggestions presented.

Because we are living in a visually-oriented society, our students respond well to images. In fact, it often seems that images evoke better responses than does the printed word. The use of pictures and other realia has long been a strategy used by foreign language teachers to stimulate student responses. Teachers have found that the use of visual media seems to facilitate the process of linking meaning to target language words without inserting the native language in the thought process. Therefore, if visual stimuli are used extensively in classroom activities, such stimuli certainly have a place in the testing program also.

USING PICTURES TO TEST VOCABULARY

Many teachers feel that testing vocabulary is still an essential ingredient of the learning process. The traditional vocabulary quiz is a list of words in one language to be translated into the other. For example:

Write the following words in Spanish:

1. living room
2. kitchen
3. bedroom
4. bathroom
5. dining room
6. basement

Fortunately, most teachers have become more creative in testing the acquisition of lexical items. By using more creative ways to test vocabulary, such as incorporating pictures rather than presenting lists of words, the teacher can design quizzes that permit some variety in the answers, that link vocabulary to context, and that avoid the use of the native language in the testing process. Pictures can be incorporated into the testing structure in various ways. The pictures can be provided to the students or drawn by them. Pictures can be used as a basis for composition or as a means of testing listening or reading comprehension. Pictures can replace lists of words to test lexical items. There are numerous possibilities such as those described below.

Labeling: The most basic vocabulary test with pictures is one in which the students label illustrations of the vocabulary items being tested. For example:

1. Label the rooms of the house pictured.
2. Label the articles of clothing on this page from a store catalog.
3. Label the animals that we see on Mr. Brown's farm.

Pictures can be used to test verbs also. It is fairly easy to assemble a supply of pictures or drawings of people engaged in various activities. These drawings can be set in columns on the test for identification by the students. The teacher indicates the subject and verb tense to be used. Several of the pictures should be relatively ambiguous so that two or three verbs are possible for the same picture, thereby giving the students some choice and reinforcing the concept that there is not always only one correct answer.

Drawing and Labeling: The next step after labeling, and one which is more fun for both students and teacher, is to have the students first draw something and then label the vocabulary items. To test the vocabulary for the rooms of the house using this technique, the teacher asks the students to draw a house and then label the rooms. The previous example which required the students to label a drawing provided by the teacher affords the teacher more control over the vocabulary tested, but with appropriate directions, the students can be led to produce the desired lexical items. For example:

Draw a picture or a floor plan of the house you would like to have when you are 30. You may have as many rooms as you like, but you will need 6 different rooms for full credit.

Since most students will know only those words which were presented in class, they will use these words in creating their drawings. If they learned other words as a result of a similar activity in class they should also be acceptable answers. The grading is essentially the same as it would be for the quiz described above. However, instead of producing a list of translations out of context, the students are asked to produce words in a meaningful context.

Two other samples of questions of this type are illustrated below.

1. (Provide outline figures of a man and a woman.) Dress Gloria and Pepe and label the items of clothing that you put on them. You will need ten items for full credit. (You may receive up to three extra points for additional items.)

2. Draw a picture of your favorite monster and label its body parts. Be sure to include definite articles. You will need ten items for full credit. (You may receive up to three bonus points for additional items.)

Drawing and Describing: Student drawings can be used to enliven a test. Even though the students could be asked to write a paragraph without a drawing, asking them to describe something that they have drawn not only makes the test more interesting, but also helps the students to focus on what to say. By picturing the subject in their minds and then transferring that image to paper, the students may overcome that mental block which often arises when asked to describe something. Every teacher has heard students complain that they do not know what to say in response to a testing prompt. Examples of test items:

1. Make a drawing of the teacher. Then write a description of what you have drawn. You should include at least six adjectives in your description.
2. Draw a picture of three of your family members and then write three sentences describing each one. You may include yourself if you wish.

3. Draw a picture of your bedroom and then write a paragraph describing it to me. Tell me what is in your room and what you like to do there.
4. Draw pictures depicting the things you plan to do during our spring vacation. Under each picture write a sentence in the future explaining your plans.

Drawing What Is Described: By writing a paragraph in which the lexical items being tested are used, the teacher can test reading comprehension. Rather than have the students translate the paragraph or answer questions about it, the teacher can ask the students to draw a picture illustrating the paragraph. The paragraphs can be written with the verbs in various tenses. These are easy to grade because the teacher has only to look at the picture. (As a listening comprehension exercise, the paragraph can be read rather than written.) The teacher's creativity comes into play in the invention of a logical paragraph incorporating current and recycled vocabulary. On a test, the text would appear only in the target language. The English gloss is included here for information.

1. La familia Zepol es muy rara. El padre es muy alto y tiene bigote. La madre es baja y gorda. Lleva una falda muy corta. El hijo mayor tiene ojos grandes y toca la guitarra. El hijo menor tiene orejas pequeñas y lleva anteojos. La hija mayor tiene pelo rizado y pies enormes. La hija menor, la pobre Lola, tiene dos narices. Dibuja la familia Zepol.

The Zepol family is very strange. The father is very tall and has a mustache, and the mother is short and fat. She is wearing a short skirt. The older son has big eyes

and plays the guitar. The younger son has small ears and wears glasses. The older daughter has curly hair and enormous feet. The younger daughter, poor Lola, has two noses. Draw the Zepol family.

2. Dibuja una casa. Esta casa tiene dos ventanas y una puerta. Hay flores enfrente de la casa y un árbol a la izquierda, cerca de la acera. La casa tiene dos chimeneas. Dibuja un gato sobre el techo, entre las dos chimeneas. Dibuja dos pájaros en el cielo cerca del árbol. Hay una chica dentro de la casa. Ella mira por la ventana.

Draw a house. The house has two windows and a door. There are flowers in front of the house and a tree to the left, near the sidewalk. The house has two chimneys. Draw a cat on the roof between the two chimneys. Draw two birds in the sky near the tree. There is a girl in the house. She is looking out the window.

3. Cuando Pablo salió de la casa ayer, eran las ocho de la mañana. Había muchas nubes grises y estaba lloviznando. A las nueve en punto se estalló una tormenta muy grande. El cielo se iluminó con la luz de un rayo y poco después comenzó a llover. Pablo llevaba un impermeable y botas. Así que el mal tiempo no le molestó nada. Haga un dibujo o una serie de dibujos para ilustrar la escena.

When Paul left the house yesterday, it was 8 AM. There were a lot of grey clouds, and it was drizzling. At exactly 9 o'clock, a big storm broke out. The sky was lit by the light of a lightning bolt, and shortly afterwards, it began to rain. Paul was wearing a raincoat and boots, so

the bad weather didn't bother him at all. Make a drawing or series of drawings to illustrate the scene.

Responding to Pictures: The testing items which follow do not require artistic creativity on the part of the students. They are included here because they do involve the use of pictures or drawings on the test. The drawings may be produced through the artistic creativity of the teacher or by photocopying pictures from the text or elsewhere. On the most basic level, the students can simply label items as in the section above, such as the food on a salad bar, the parts of the body, the dishes and silverware in a place setting, etc. On a more advanced level, the students can be asked to describe a drawing which is reproduced on the test. Many textbooks have pictures that illustrate vocabulary from the chapter and can be used for this type of exercise. Students can be asked to describe a scene, to describe pictures of people, to compare pictures of people or objects with different characteristics, to express likes and dislikes, and many other similar tasks. As mentioned previously,the use of visuals provides a framework to organize the students' thoughts and to guide their compostion. Pictures can be used as organizers to guide compositions on a test just as they are used for conversation aids or homework assignments. Students can be asked to write dialogues to accompany a series of pictures, to fill in the balloons on cartoons, to arrange pictures in a logical order and write about them, to retell a story based on the pictures given, etc. Most of the strategies used as part of the classroom activities can also be incorporated into the testing format. For example:

1. Describe the positions of the people and animals in the picture.

2. (Pictures of people engaged in various activities.) Write sentences in the imperfect to describe what these people used to do as children.

3. Look at the map below and write the directions to go from the bank to the post office. (Use a partial map of your community with places familiar to the students.)

4. This is Paco. Paco received all F's at midterm for the last grading period. Paco's parents have threatened to send him to work on a llama ranch if he doesn't shape up. Paco has decided to reform, but he doesn't know exactly what went wrong. First, using impersonal expressions, such as "it is possible" and "it is obvious", make at least five observations as to Paco had academic difficulties. Second, using verbs such as "to suggest" and "to recommend", write five suggestions as to what Paco can do to improve. Do not repeat the same ideas in the two groups of sentences.

5. This is Fulana de Tal. She has decided to go job hunting. Finish the sentences below with some suggestions to help her.

   I suggest that. . .
   I recommend that. . .
   It is necessary for her. . .

I doubt that. . .
I believe that. . .

6. (A series of pictures telling a story.) Write a story to accompany these pictures. Connect your sentences with words such as *first, next, later,* etc.

7. (Pictures of people engaged in various activities.)

Write a paragraph describing what this group of friends did yesterday and why.

8. (A bank scene with two bank robbers). Yesterday two thieves entered this bank to rob it. Write a paragraph of approximately 100 words describing the thoughts of the other people in the bank; why the men decided to rob the bank, and what they planned to do with the money; and what happened next. Was the robbery successful? Did someone sound the alarm? Did the police arrive in time? Were there hostages? Use your imagination. Most of your verbs should not be in the present tense.

LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY

The test items illustrated in the first part of this article involve a visual stimulus, whether it is provided to the students or drawn by them. In most cases, the students were permitted to exercise a degree of linguistic creativity. In other words, there were often several correct answers. In the series of test suggestions which follow, this same principle continues. The students are guided by the teacher concerning the type of answer desired, but the exact answer

will vary from student to student. In some cases the degree of creativity will be slight. Indeed, some may say that the sentences are little more than pure translation sentences. Nevertheless, the students are free to change the wording and to substitute vocabulary. The fact that the directions are not "Translate the following sentences", but rather "Tell me" establishes a more communicative mind set. The teacher who is concerned that the students cannot figure out anything to say can give an example in English of a possible answer. The teacher's example will probably be translated by some of the students. Since the teacher will have suggested the preferred structure, such responses are certainly admissible.

Once again, it is important to mention that similar sentences will have been practiced in class and/or given as homework before appearing on a test. A series of sentences on a test would reflect the vocabulary and structures of a particular unit and should be related logically to one another. The examples which follow are not all from one test, but are ideas for testing several different structures.

Tell me

1. . . . where your parents live
2. . . . where your grandparents are from
3. . . . what color your house is
4. . . . how many students are in this class
5. . . . how much money you have in the bank
6. . . . what you did last weekend
7. . . . what you brought to class with you today
8. . . . where you were at 6 o'clock this morning
9. . . . what you did on Saturdays when you were ten.
10. . . . that you hope to get a good grade on this test

The same format can be used to elicit questions from the students by using "Ask me" rather than "Tell me". The format can be varied to include "ask" or "tell" someone else, such as "Tell your parents why you need more money."

Sentence Completion: Having students complete sentences which are begun for them by the teacher is nothing new. However, the technique can be effective and may allow the students to write creatively. After all, it really does not matter if the students say "My shoes are black" or "My shoes are white." In the past, students were constantly frustrated because they never learned how to say anything that they wanted to say, and were forced to translate sentences such as "The contented brown cows were eating oats in the old, wooden barn." Recent textbooks have much more relevant vocabulary and many exercises which allow the students to be creative and which encourage divergent answers. Many of the exercises in today's texts attempt to create meaningful context. Therefore, the teacher should also attempt meaningful context on tests. If the teacher plans to include "finish-the-sentence" type questions on a test, the sentences should all relate to a particular context and have relevance to the lives of the students. In the example which follows, a context is established, and the sentences all relate to this single theme. Only five sentence fragments are included in the example. The number can vary according to the wishes of the teacher as to the length of the test and whether this example would comprise the whole exam or only a portion of it.

Ed and Claire are engaged. They plan to get married right after graduation even though neither one has

a job. Finish the sentences giving your thoughts on their situation.

1. Ed's parents doubt that. . .
2. Claire's parents are sure that. . .
3. Ed and Claire know that. . .
4. It is probable that. . .
5. They are looking for an apartment that. . .

In the example above, it can be seen that the use of the subjunctive will be tested. The beginning of the sentence can be in English to test lexical items such as "doubt" and "probable", or the entire exercise can be in the target language. As an extended exercise, a wide range of subjunctive uses and tenses can be incorporated as the saga of Ed and Claire unfolds. The vocabulary used by the students can vary, thus reinforcing the concept that there is not always only one correct answer. In a grammar-translation test item, such as "Ed and Claire didn't want Ed's parents to lend them money," the students who could not remember the verb "to lend" would fail to complete the sentence even though they might well have known that the correct verb form would be the past subjunctive--the point being tested. In completion items, it is possible to test grammar points more independently.

GUIDELINES

There are some guidelines necessary for allowing creativity on the part of the students. The teacher must specify in the directions exactly what is to be done. For example, if the students are asked to draw and label, the directions must specify how many items are to be included

for credit, whether or not there will be bonus points for extra items, how many bonus points will be possible, and whether or not the article is to be included with the noun. Even though it should be obvious, the directions should include the statement that the labeling is to be done in the target language. If there is the possibility that the students' drawings will be unrecognizable, ask that the picture be labeled in both languages. This extra step is only advisable if, for example, students have been asked to draw animals which make certain sounds. When asking for the students to write paragraphs or to complete sentences, it is important to mention the tense which is to be used, the necessity of using a certain number of different verbs, etc. A statement such as "Please use a different verb in each sentence" will generally suffice. The more often these types of items are used in classroom activities and appear on tests, the more familiar the students will be with the expected guidelines. At first it will be necessary to reassure the students that artistic ability is not being graded. If the teacher includes drawings which are obviously of amateur quality, the students will not be intimidated. Secondly, it is wise to train the students to paraphrase and to think of all of the different ways in which a question could be answered. For example, the response to the item "Ask me if I'm married" could be "Are you married?" or "Are you single?" or "Do you have a spouse?". Paraphrasing and circumlocution are essential communication skills for beginning and intermediate language learners who will not always know the exact words they would like to use.

The testing suggestions given are designed for a particular situation. These are test items for those occasions when purely written testing is desired. These testing strategies are suitable for large classes and can be adapted

for many other purposes. The use of pictures to test vocabulary is particularly appropriate for lower levels when students typically are introduced to groups of lexical items with a common theme, such as food, articles of clothing, parts of the body, animals, etc. Using pictures as a basis for writing sentences and compositions is appropriate at all levels. Through the use of visual stimuli, students can be encouraged to relate the target language to the actual object or situation rather than to engage in a sort of filtering process through the native language. In addition, the use of pictures and of test items which ask for completions or original sentences rather than translations reinforce the concept that there are many ways to say the same thing. It is essential that students learn to look for different ways to express their ideas. If the ability to circumlocute is one of the goals in the classroom, then there should be opportunities for circumlocution on the tests also. By being creative, teachers can design testing strategies which mirror the strategies used in classroom activities and, therefore, which test those linguistic behaviors that have been encouraged throughout the instructional period.

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